

Policy On Disaster Risk Management

1. Preamble

- 1.1 The State of Meghalaya is vulnerable to natural disasters owing to its unique geo-climatic features. The major natural hazards for the State are earthquake, landslides, floods, cloudbursts, drought, fire, etc. The State has witnessed a number of great disasters such as the earthquake of 12th June, 1897 etc. These disasters result in loss of life and property – public and private – and disrupt economic activity, besides causing immense misery and hardship to the affected population.
- 1.2 The natural disasters have adversely impacted the economic development of the State. The disasters divert the energies and resources away from planned growth and development. While natural hazards cannot be controlled, the vulnerability to these hazards can be substantially reduced by planned mitigation and preparedness measures.
- 1.3 Reducing the risks posed by disasters is not an optional extra, but it is central to the very success of development itself. It is an urgent priority not only for the disaster managers, but also for the development planners and policy makers. Though ‘Disaster’ is a State subject, the Central Government has provided a broad framework for disaster management. The Government of Meghalaya recognizes the importance of the national disaster management framework and had decided to frame specific policy guidelines consistent with its needs.

2. Objectives

The main aim of this Policy is establishing principles and guidelines on various aspects of Disaster Management and making the people increasingly resilient to disaster. The focus is on reducing disaster risks and vulnerability through strengthening of government and non-government organizations, physical infrastructures and the capacities of the communities in meeting the challenges posed by disasters in the State of Meghalaya.

3. Fundamental Principles of the Disaster Management Policy

- 3.1 The approach of the State Government will be proactive – in prevention, mitigation, and preparedness before a disaster strikes. Its focus will shift from “relief, restoration and rehabilitation” to “planning, prevention and preparedness”.

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- 3.2 The State Government will follow a holistic approach in dealing with disasters by making disaster prevention and preparedness and integral part of every development policy and plan. Disaster mitigation concerns will be adopted in all schemes/projects/development plans being developed and executed by the Government.
- 3.3 The State Government believes that disaster management is the responsibility of all organisations-government and non-government:- and all people who may be potentially affected by a disaster. Non-governmental organisations, religious organisations, the private sector, academic institutions, NCC, Scouts & Guides, Nehru Yuvak Kendras, NSS, ex-servicemen, along with the community will be sensitized, trained and co-opted into the planning process as well as the response mechanisms.
- 3.4 Particular attention will be paid towards addressing the reduction of vulnerabilities of women, children, aged and other disadvantaged sections of the society to disasters through appropriate prevention, mitigation and preparedness strategies.
- 3.5 The Policy will aim to strengthen capacity of all institutions concerned with disaster management and the community in order to mitigate the impact of disasters. New institutions may be set up where the existing mechanisms are found inadequate.
- 3.6 There shall be no discrimination in providing assistance under disaster management on grounds of religion, community, creed castes or sex.
- 3.7 It is not possible for the State Government to bear all the costs of disaster management. The long-term approach is to move towards risk transfer mechanism by introducing incentives to individuals and other entities to protect their interests through insurance.

4. Strategy

4A. Legal Framework

The institutions/individuals responsible for implementing disaster management activities must have the necessary legal sanction and validity with requisite powers for managing emergency situations. The Government of Meghalaya **will** adopt the legal framework provided under the National Disaster Management Act, 2005 that incorporates the roles of all relevant institutions responsible for managing disasters.

4B. Institutional Framework and Key Responsibilities

- 4.B.1 The State Disaster Management Authority (MSDMA) as provided under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 along with various executive bodies at the State and District level shall be established. "The MSDMA will be the apex body in disaster management and provide necessary guidance for disaster management activities. Responsibility for the declaration of a disaster at any level in the State rests with the MSDMA or to an authority to whom it is delegated by MSDMA. The declaration can be made on the recommendation of the State Relief Commissioner .**The Deputy Commissioner will send the Proposals to the Government through the State Relief Commissioner for declaration of disaster in the affected areas.**
- 4.B.2. The Revenue and Disaster Management Department will be the Nodal Department for disaster management and under the leadership of the State Relief Commissioner shall play the coordinating role in disaster management. Responsibilities for initiation and execution of emergency relief and recovery and rehabilitation measures rests with State Revenue and Disaster Management Department, in conjunction with other relevant Government Departments. All other departments concerned with disaster management shall ensure adequate assistance to the nodal department.
- 4.B.3. The Deputy Commissioner will play the pivotal role at the district level, head of the District Disaster Management Authority and ensure coordinated implementation of the disaster management activities.
- 4.B.4. There shall be Block Disaster Management Committees at block level and Village Disaster Management Committees at village level for performing appropriate disaster management activities at their respective levels consistent with their resources and capacities.
- 4.B.5. The response to a disaster requires coordination of resources available across all the Departments and agencies. The State Government will ensure an appropriate chain of command and legal framework whereby the State Relief Commissioner at the State Level and Deputy Commissioners at the District Level are empowered to mobilise resources of all relevant Departments and agencies in the event of an emergency. If necessary, the above mentioned authorities could also requisition and utilise the resources available with armed forces, central paramilitary forces, central organisation, local authorities, NGOs, public sector, private individuals and the community for disaster management.
- 4.B.6. The State Government will endeavour to work out an arrangement for sharing of resource with neighbouring States during emergencies.

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4C. Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation

- 4.C.1 Appropriate Disaster Management plans will be drawn up at the State and District, **Block and Village** Levels to ensure coordination and holistic response to a disaster.
- 4.C.2. A systematic study of the risk assessment and vulnerability in respect of main hazards facing the state – earthquakes, floods landslides, fires, cyclone and hailstorms, droughts and mining/industrial/chemical disasters – will be taken up and specific action plans formulated to handle such disasters.
- 4.C.3. Each Government department shall prepare its plan/SOP and **Emergency Support Function and** have a mechanism for its **half** yearly review. All departments will identify in advance the tasks, which they will be expected to perform in major disasters and will prepare a detailed plan for emergency response. The personnel/teams will be identified to perform these tasks, the equipment/stores will be kept in ready for mobilisation at the request of the nodal authority.
- 4.C.4. The communities are the first responders in a disaster situation and need to be empowered to manage disasters. The objective is to make the community aware about their vulnerability to natural hazard, to organize them in various teams and to train these teams in dealing with the impending disasters as first responders. Therefore, capacity building will be taken up at all levels-state, districts, blocks, villages and capacity of the communities as well as the personnel from Government, NGOs, and all agencies concerned with handling hazards/calamities shall be strengthened. The Meghalaya Administrative Training institute **has been** strengthened with the establishment of disaster management cell therein.
- 4.C.5. The State will build specialized search and rescue teams with the support of Central Government. The Central Training Institute of the Home Guards and Civil Defence will be strengthened for imparting training to search and rescue teams.
- 4.C.6. The State Government will endeavour to bring its Building Codes and relevant Byelaws in accordance with the recommendations of the National Expert Committee on Techno-legal regime as consistent with the specific needs of the State. The relevant authorities (Urban Development Department/Municipal bodies/District Councils. Traditional Institutional shall ensure that the building codes and type designs as laid down by State Government above are

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followed. Where buildings being constructed with government grant or aid it shall be mandatory that the construction is as per the relevant Building Codes specified by the State Government. The Hazard Safety Cell constituted by the Government shall put in place a mechanism to ensure that all future constructions both government and non-government – adhere to the specified Building Codes. Appropriate training will also be imparted to local authorities responsible for enforcing safe construction standards. The masons, engineers, builders and other stakeholders in the building construction will be trained in appropriate building technologies.

- 4.C.7. The State Govt. will seek to retrofit lifeline buildings with available resources in a feasible time-frame. The Govt. shall also encourage retrofitting of private buildings particularly those where large number of people congregate such as Cinema Halls, shopping complexes, multi storey apartments, etc.
- 4.C.8. The State Government will encourage the financial institutions to review that lending guidelines to ensure adoption of safe construction practices also the requirements for insurance in case of new constructions. They will also be encouraged to loan funds for retrofitting purposes.
- 4.C.9. Disaster management will form an integral part of school curriculum and teachers training courses.
- 4.C.10. Information Technologies will be used for forecasting, prediction, early warning, dissemination, disaster database management, web-based inventorization of resources for disaster management. The IDRN network will be updated regularly.
- 4.C.11. Emergency Operation Centres shall be established in the State HQ and districts and communication equipments installed and networked.
- 4.C.12. The State Government believes that awareness generation is a key prerequisite for prevention, mitigation and preparedness by the community. Existing institutions like press, radio, television will be used extensively for the campaign. The posters, pamphlets, manuals in vernacular language will be published and distributed. The manuals for appropriate construction technologies (using local materials) will be prepared in simple and local language with drawings and will be distributed amongst the masses. The traditional institutions (village durbars etc.) will be used for disaster management extensively.

4D. Response Management

- 4.D.1. In the event of a major disaster MSDMA will declare emergency and monitor response activities from time to time. The executive committee under the Chief Secretary will meet more frequently for monitoring, review and decision-making. It will be the State Relief Commissioner who will coordinate the relief activities on a real time basis and take prompt decisions. Wherever necessary he will take approval of superior authorities. At the district level, the Deputy Commissioner will perform a similar role under the overall supervision of the SRC.
- 4.D.2. The immediate priority will be Search and Rescue, opening of surface communication to areas which are cut off, provision of medical aid, food, shelter, drinking water, and sanitation. The various task forces created at the village, block and district level will be useful at this stage. However if need be, the help of armed forces could be sought. The objective of relief activities would be to address the immediate need and not to continue for more than necessary period as to compromise the population social esteem.
- 4.D.3. Adequate arrangement of security for the relief materials will be arranged.
- 4.D.4. Information to be shared by SRC and the D.C., with the press on regular basis to prevent spread of rumours.
- 4.D.5. A quick estimate of damage assessment to be undertaken for assessing the relief requirements.
- 4.D.6. Transparency in the entire relief operations will be maintained through participation of the community and local leaders and issue of regular bulletins on information.

4.E. RECOVERY MANAGEMENT

- 4.E.1. Detailed assessment of damage to be undertaken through respective Departments for taking up rehabilitation works as quickly as possible.
- 4.E.2. A rehabilitation plan to be prepared through the participation of concerned Departments and approved by the MSDMA.

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4.E.3. Mobilisation of resources to be taken up-through State funds, central assistance, charitable organisations and international assistance. To avoid duplication, the funds and relief/rehabilitation activities to be routed through the MSDMA Executive Committee/ SRC/DC only.

4.F. Documentation

The Government will support efforts to document the disaster event(s), its management and lessons learnt as it would help in improving disaster management strategy in the future.

